

How Do You Spend Your Saturdays?



One of the most significant changes we have made to the Military Program in the academic year is the creation of one eight-hour training Saturday for each cadet regiment during the academic year. We created these opportunities after realizing that the traditional four-hour block of time allocated to the Commandant on some Saturday mornings was not sufficient to train military skills to standard.

The day consists of four two-hour blocks of instruction and hands-on training, conducted at Ranges 4 and 5 and at Camp Buckner. The tasks presented in each block are tasks our Soldiers are performing in Iraq and Afghanistan every day. The training was planned, coordinated, and supervised by the tactical chain of command and executed by the cadet leadership.

The tasks, and the conditions under which they are trained were developed by our officers and NCOs, who have recent combat experience in Afghanistan and Iraq and used these skills in combat. They also used their experience as a vehicle to engage the cadets about why they are training on these tasks and how they apply to the current operating environment.

The Brigade Tactical Department (BTD) has done an excellent job of structuring the preparation and training to maximize the opportunities for the cadet chains of command to prepare and rehearse training according to the Army's eight-step training model. Using time allocated to USCC, the cadet chains of command set up the training schedules, finalized logistical support requirements, completed their risk reduction analyses, and briefed their plans to their subordinates in the weeks leading up to the training. This allowed the BTD to ensure the training was properly planned and resourced while still safeguarding cadet study time.

We designed the events themselves so that the cadet leadership—team leaders, squad leaders, and platoon leaders—led their units through the training. Tactical officers and NCOs supervised each training site, and most of the on-site administrative and support requirements were handled by cadets assigned to staff support positions within the chain of command. This freed up the cadet leadership to focus on preparing themselves and their units to execute the training.

First Regiment's day, on 22 October, was a great day to be a soldier—the temperature was in the low 50s, with overcast skies and a light but steady rain. The cadets commenced movement at 0730, with two companies heading to each of the four sites. Alpha and Bravo companies headed first to Ranges 4 and 5 for the reflexive firing and “stress shoot.”

Reflexive firing, formerly called Advanced Rifle Marksmanship, focuses on the close battle, where targets are generally engaged within 25 meters. This technique uses low-carry and high-carry positions and a “point and shoot” method. In the low carry, the weapon's butt stock is firmly seated in the shoulder pocket and the weapon is pointed down at a 45-degree angle. This mode is used primarily for moving in an urban environment, such as entering buildings and courtyards, when immediate contact is not expected. The weapon can be swung up to a firing position and the firer can engage a target in a split-second.

In the high carry, the weapon's butt stock is firmly seated in the shoulder pocket and the muzzle is pointed in the direction of expected contact. The firer is scanning his/her zone of responsibility, and as the eyes move, the weapon muzzle follows. The trigger finger is over the trigger guard to minimize the chances of a negligent discharge, but the firer can immediately engage any targets.

The upper class cadets first learned these skills during Cadet Field Training, so this is an opportunity to reinforce and refine their understanding. For the plebes, this builds on the Basic Rifle Marksmanship training and reflexive firing familiarization they received in Cadet Basic Training.

The next station, at Range 5, is the “stress shoot.” The bulk of the marksmanship training that most of us received and conducted in our careers was deliberately calm and settled. While it effectively taught basic skills, it was also unrealistic in that our stress levels were low and our heart rates and breathing were under control. That is not, however, the environment in which our Soldiers operate. The training at this site is purposefully designed to require our cadets to engage targets successfully under conditions of physical and mental stress.

The scenario is thus: a simulated convoy is struck by an improvised explosive device and then comes under small-arms fire. The cadets must exit their vehicles, move the “casualties”

(two full five-gallon water cans on stretchers) from the kill zone to cover, and then engage a sequence of “enemy” targets as they low-crawl or high-crawl between available cover. From watching the two training days this past October, I can guarantee that the cadets experienced the training as we intended.

Training on establishing and operating access control points (ACP) and improvised explosive devices (IED) took place at Camp Buckner.

At the ACP sites, cadets learned how to establish and operate control points. They trained in platoon-sized elements and focused their efforts on establishing and providing security for the ACP, properly conducting vehicle and personnel searches, and reacting to ground attack or discovery of an explosive device.

The focus at the final station is on teaching battle drills for reacting to the discovery or detonation of an IED. Cadets were trained to recognize the typical signs of IEDs, such as wires emerging from dirt along a path or road, an unusual pile of debris or garbage at the side of the road, or signs of recent digging on or alongside a path or road. The balance of the training focused on battle drills after the detonation of an IED—establishing security, treating and evacuating casualties, and continuing the mission.

Although this training was a significant step up from that previously conducted during the academic year, we do not intend to make the cadets experts in these techniques or to have this training supplant Cadet Summer Training. Rather, it is to provide a chance for the academic-year chains of command to plan and execute meaningful, multi-echelon military training according to the Army's published training doctrine. These tasks are relevant to the Army the cadets will soon enter and support my objective of ensuring cadets are comfortable with their personal weapons. The training turned out to be extremely successful, and cadet feedback indicated we achieved our objectives. We will continue to look in the future at opportunities for the cadet leadership to plan and lead military training, within the confines of the cadet time schedule.

GO ARMY!